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Learning Another Way of Life by Living It

Gail Devens

Iowa State University

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Gail Devens

President Kennedy says that American prestige abroad is at an all-time low. *The Ugly American*, by Burdick and Lederer, paints a realistic picture of the United States' diplomatic blunders.

There are, however, programs of international scope that are working at the foundation level for better understanding between nations. One of these programs is the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE), an exchange of "grass-roots ambassadors."

The IFYE program is a cultural exchange of farm youth from the United States who live and work with farm families in other countries for four to six months, and farm young people from co-operating countries who come to the United States to live and work on our farms. Last year 230 IFYE's from 41 states and 45 countries participated in the exchange. In the twelve years since it was started almost 2,500 young people have found homes in countries other than their own.

In the United States, the National 4-H Club Foundation and the extension services of the United States Department of Agriculture and land-grant colleges conduct the program. Other government agencies, rural organizations, foundations and educational institutions also co-operate. Anyone between the ages of 20 and 30 who

In Finland

"Learning Another W

has a farm background and at least a high school education is eligible to apply for the program.

As an IFYE to Finland this year I won't just pack my bag and set sail for Finland. Preparation for living in a country for six months involves more than making a quick itinerary of "Europe in a month." This program calls for advance study of the geography, history, culture and agriculture of both the United States and the country to be visited.

Americans have a bad reputation for not learning a language other than English, but IFYE's are guided by the words of John Foster Dulles who said, "Interpreters are not enough. It is not possible to understand what is in the minds of other people without understanding their language, and without understanding their language it is impossible to be sure that they understand what is on our minds." To facilitate language study the 4-H Foundation has prepared language records with important words and phrases to be used as the basic minimum for our studies. (And now when I think of a farmer I think "maanviljelia.")

While tackling the language problem we also must stop and look around the United States. When we are asked questions like, "Why don't you let Negroes go to your schools?", "Why do you have unemployment?" and "Do all your people go to church?", we must be qualified to answer accurately and objectively. The bibliography of suggested books and articles to read includes books on the attitudes and values of our culture, religion in America and its influence on tradition, social customs and our way of life. IFYE's going to a non-Christian country make an intensive study of religion as a basis for many of the differences in traditions and culture. Also included in the United States bibliography are books on economics, industry

and labor, education, government, agriculture, family life and culture.

The theme of the IFYE program is "learning another way of life by living it." We're not guests, and we're not tourists. We're part of the family. The philosophy is that the real value of foreign study is the time spent in a person's home where cultures meet each other on a personal basis. IFYE's bring back pictures of their host "mom and dad" and their host "family." They have learned to accept another culture, rather than trying to change it. They live, work and play with farm families, sharing their day-to-day experiences. To many host families, IFYE's are the first representatives of the United States they have known.

While in the country we are challenged to analyze observations and report back to our own communities. These experiences and explanations are a major part of the program. As an example of what I (or any typical IFYE) can anticipate, the average IFYE travels more than 20,000 miles, giving 100 talks to 8,500 people. We also make 11 radio and television appearances and write 40 news articles. Because of this person-to-person plan, the term "grass-roots ambassadors" has been applied to the IFYE delegates.

No government funds are used to finance the IFYE exchange. Each state extension service that participates in the project contributes \$1000 for the cost of each two-way exchange—that is, sending a delegate out of the United States and receiving a foreign youth in exchange. State contributions are raised by local 4-H Clubs, young men and women's groups, farm organizations, service clubs, local business firms and individuals. A \$375,000 grant from the Danforth Foundation assures a minimum of 100 IFYE exchanges until 1965.

In Nepal of Life by Living It"

Sharron Scheline, a junior in Institution Management at Iowa State last year, has been in Nepal since September, 1960, as an IFYE ambassador. Nepal is an Asian country on the northeast border of India in the Himalayas. The following excerpts are from a letter Sharron wrote after her first three weeks with her host families. Before entering college, Sharron was honored with the national "Make It with Wool" contest junior division award and was an active 4-H Club member.

Dear Friends,

America and Nepal, Bhai-Bhai! America and Nepal, brother-brother! My experiences here vary from washing clothes and hair at the village tarada (community water supply), with a cow on one side and little host sister sudsing down on the other, to preparing American-style chicken over a tiny little chula on a clay floor. That family will never forget me since they have a remnant of my tooth, broken on the drumstick I chomped into with great relish. Toughest old hen I've ever tackled — cooked it five hours!

Little bits of understanding keep creeping in as I work along with my host mothers. They wrap a very long cloth around their middle that appears very bulky and hard to bend in. But I have worn one too, for that strip of fabric offers a marvelous pocket area, acts as a towel, and holds the sari up while the women squat to shake the chaf from the rice, churn a pot of milk, roll the pancake-style bread, shuck a few hundred ears of corn, cook a pot of vegetables or wash dishes with the Nepali charcoal soap. I've done all of these tasks and many more so often that my knees aren't creaking anymore! I have found there is a reason that a stick is not a part of the broom handle equipment. The unlevel clay floors simply don't get clean when operating from a distance!

In addition to having pleasant temperaments and sturdy, quick minds, the people in the hill villages here are very healthy. After a short glance at the evident malnutrition in the scrawny bodies in other countries, the short statures and nearly steel physiques of the hard working Nepalese were very welcome. Two meals a day of enormous quantities of rice, a mixture of tarkardi that includes potatoes, okra, turnips, garlic and many other seasonings, side dishes of spinach prepared like sauerkraut, and beans with and without pods make a very substantial menu. Perhaps three times a week the meat-eating classes have chicken, goat or fish. All cooking is done on top of the chula, which is a built-in cooking hole, either with water or sesame oil. The children are constantly munching on peanuts or string beans toasted in the coals and bananas or other fruits which produce beautiful complexions and healthy skins.

I've had many chances to visit schools and found libraries small, but noticed students learning to read and write Nepali and studying arithmetic, geography and history in their first four years at school. The Char Pati Clubs (4-H) are often instrumental in erecting schools with some government aid.

From the day my first host mother presented me with some fabric and said, "I want a blouse like yours," I was busy with needle and thread. I produced paper patterns for little girls' shirtwaist dresses like mine, men's shirts and trousers in addition to sewing the clothing articles on a hand-operated machine. I have taught the girls in one school to crochet, even though their knitting skill was already developed to produce sweaters, caps, vests and bags. My host brother aided in whittling crochet hooks from bamboo.

The people of Nepal do a marvelous job in the way of sanitary



Sharron Scheline

conditions with what they have. Sabun (soap) is at a premium and made from a nut crushed and worked into a ball. The shell provides the grit effect for cleaning clothing on a flat rock while sloshing water and kneading. Soap for dishwashing is simply ashes from the fire and lots of elbow grease applied to the corn husk cloth. All the villagers arrived when I brushed my teeth to treat themselves to my Colgate, rather than the charcoal they use to make their smiles white and shining.

I find my long petticoat a marvelous bathing costume, as I'm not expert with wrapping my sari, washing and then getting into another without so much as showing a kneecap. Even took a swim in the river in that same long petticoat with the entire village jumping with glee on the bank!

I don't admire too many things because the villagers give me anything I admire. But after three weeks my trunk was crowded with kurkuries, saris, wooden jugs, Nepalese combs, hair ornaments, and other little things presented as friendship reminders. These things are worth a barrel of understanding, a few tears, a big bundle of love, a bunch of laughs, and best of all, they stand for people with hearts and hands just like those at home.

Sincerely,
Sharron Scheline